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THE
PSYCHICAL TENDENCIES OF MEDICAL SCIENCE.

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[THE following paper is the concluding one of a series contributed to the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INSANITY, under the title, "CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE OF THE PHYSICAL ORGANIZATION AND MENTAL MANIFESTATIONS." These papers have been received with much favor by the readers of the JOURNAL, have obtained at various times flattering notices from the press, and have been in part translated for the columns of European journals. The concluding essay, being of a character to make it proper for publication apart from the remainder of the series, we are happy to reprint, in compliment to the writer, and for the gratification of his numerous friends.—PUBS. JOURNAL OF INSANITY.]

"The future elevation of medical science, in all its branches, will be most intimately connected with the advancement of Psychology."—*Damerow.*

THOSE who have watched carefully the progress of medical science during the last quarter of a century, can not have failed to perceive to what extent the psychological element has entered into, and contributed to this advancement.

This fact finds illustration not only in the science, legitimately so-called, but in those modern systems of practice, which, whether reasonable or unreasonable, philosophical or unphilosophical, true or

false, have each found able and conscientious supporters, and equally able and honest opponents—faithful believers, “even unto death,” and unfaithful disbelievers; men having nothing whatever in common with each other except the one sole principle, that in all things they are bound to disagree, and that the same class of facts, observed by opposing sects, shall serve to confirm diametrically opposite theories, and lead to sadly conflicting results. One sect goes forth to combat disease armed with the most potent weapons,—the lancet and barber’s basin, the blistering plaster and bolus-box—and inscribing upon their banners, as a watchword, “*Contraria contrariis curentur*.” Another, trusting in minute saccharine globules, equally remarkable for their impotence, unfurl their banners inscribed, “*Similia similibus curentur*,” and rush to the contest, shouting, “Great is Hahnemann of the homeopaths!” While some faithful disciple of a third class, like Diogenes in his tub, looks out from his comfortable *sitz-bad*, or from under the droppings of his shower-bath, and shouting, “Great is Priessnitz of the hydropaths!” seeks to throw cold water upon all sects, systems and patients, applying it to his own indiscriminately. A fourth class, respectable in philosophical attainments at least, if not in numbers, in their dealings with human infirmities are beginning to recognize in all cases, and among all sects, the operation of a psychological element as influencing the result, as well as one purely physical or physiological, and contend most logically that neither of these elements can be entirely ignored while man is recognized as a composite being.

It must be admitted that there is in all systems much good, as well as some evil; in this system perhaps more evil of a positive, in the other of a negative character. Were this not the case, medical science would not be like most other things belonging to the earth; and, judging from the signs of the times, the medical, like the Christian millennium, though approaching is yet some centuries in the future.

In former papers we have endeavored to throw some light upon the reciprocal influence of these two elements, the physical and the

psychological in human nature, in their intimate relation to the treatment of disease, both physical and mental, (though by these terms we would not be understood as speaking of two distinct and always separable entities ; we regard the connection as too intimate, ever to admit of complete separation,) and to show that this influence is in operation in conditions and under circumstances which have not hitherto been sufficiently recognized and acknowledged ; and in further proof of this we shall here attempt to examine how far the psychological element has contributed, and still continues almost imperceptibly to contribute to the success of so many conflicting theories and systems of medicine ; and not to those which we have dignified with the names of theory or system only, but to the many forms and phases of charlatanism, which, like parasites, have attached themselves to what is now a great, noble, and must become ultimately, a perfect science.

In the first place let us consider that most specious, popular, fashionable, and, for quite obvious reasons to the attentive observer, successful medical innovation known as homeopathy, from a psychological point of view.

This most fanciful system maintains, as is well known, that all diseases are cured by the administration of medicines which are capable of inducing in the healthy system disordered actions analogous to those brought about by the disease. With the theory, *per se*, we shall not quarrel. It may, or may not be quite as true as other theories of obscure and imperfectly understood actions, for aught we know : we therefore leave this an open question. The *means*, however, by which the theorists suppose they bring about the action in question, we can not, even with the utmost stretch of credulity, recognize. Indeed, when they tell us of the potency of the decillionth part of a grain, of a substance like charcoal, nearly if not quite inert, we are inclined to smile at the wonderful credulity of the human mind, and are only prevented from laughing outright by the thought that this credulity is in itself a powerful curative agent of a character strictly psychological.

Looking merely at the physical agencies which this sect profess to employ, we are forced to exclaim, *Ex nihilo nihil fit!* But when they point us to their results, and defy us to ignore them—to hundreds of most intelligent men and women, exclaiming, “I was sick, and am well; great is homeopathy!” “I was dying, and am again made alive and whole; great is Hahnemann of the homeopaths!” we are forced, in the absence of all other means, to recognize the psychological element, which has unconsciously, so far as the practitioner and patient are concerned, contributed to, if not been the sole means of the results made manifest—results which it is not the mission of true science to ignore or despise, but to recognize, as far as they go, and to show by what physical means these good results could have been made better, had not the sect unconsciously perhaps ignored them; in the same way as the psychological element has been too much disregarded by those who have placed too much reliance on pure physical means, and these frequently of *too much* potency, becoming not unfrequently, it is to be feared, “like a sword in the hands of a fool.”

As a psychological experiment testing the power of mind, unaided by any other rational means (aside from the recuperative energies of nature) in removing physical infirmities, homeopathy can not but be regarded as most eminently successful. Success, however, is never an exact test of the entire truthfulness of any thing. By following an ingeniously devised and cunningly wrought illusion, such as frequently springs up in the dark and devious paths of an abstruse science, this sect has unconsciously stumbled upon the fragment of a great truth, which the credulity of human nature has enabled them to illustrate most amply. Having accomplished this they seem to have fulfilled their mission; for, amply satisfied with the thought of having developed the whole truth, and originated a perfect system, they become henceforth useless in the domain of science, and must give place to those who are prepared to take other steps in advance.

Homeopathy with its infinitesimals, hydropathy with its sitz-baths, its douches, its wet sheets and frictions, having failed to confer com-

plete earthly immortality upon mankind, the vapor of water, medicated or non-medicated, also having failed in this, we may reasonably anticipate shortly the introduction of a new system ; and we would suggest to those who are ambitious of an immortality like that of Hahnemann or Priessnitz, that *pneumopathy* be the designation of the coming innovation, before which undoubtedly for a time, all other systems and theories, together with all accumulated facts and deductions—all in short which has been based upon the experience of past centuries, will vanish into *air*, into “thin air,” and “like the baseless fabric of a dream, leave not a wreck behind.”

The statistical results of a new system of therapeutics based entirely upon *air*, and its numerous modifications and compounds, may not, after all, be so contemptible. Let us therefore look forward with confident hope and happy expectation to the coming innovation, whatever it may be, and with a lively faith that it will be in the exact order of Providence, and that it will fulfill its destiny, in strict accordance with, and conformity to, the spirit of the times in which it will appear, like those gone before.

But before the advent of what we have anticipated, let us cast a passing glance at another system which we already have, from a psychological point of view, lest we be charged with unthankfulness for allowing the old to pass away, or in the rapid transmutation of all earthly things, be crowded from the scene, without our having recognized the good and useful, however small the amount, which will be left behind. In hydropathy, the system of Priessnitz, the great “water witch” and medical necromancer of Silesia, the physical means employed, though not as in the former a complete nullity, are yet, (when not abused, as they frequently are most undoubtedly, by this sect,) not sufficiently far removed from it to interfere with or greatly confuse the obvious operation of the psychological element which has contributed largely towards bringing about its success, and to whatever amount of good it has wrought. The operation of causes of a purely psychological character, is equally if not more obvious in this system than in homeopathy, to which we have already referred.

What the well-conducted, modern lunatic asylum is to the insane psychologically, the modern watering-place, or the yet more modern "water cure" might and should be to the hypochondriac, the dyspeptic, and the hysterical,—all those afflicted with some one of the many phases of nervous or chronic disease, and if the medical officers were always men of science, and never the *financiers* as well as the physicians of their establishments, but paid officials, men placed by official position and emolument above the necessity of becoming money-changers in the temple of science; if, in short, these establishments were less tinctured with professional charlatanism, and like the former, ready to adopt everything which the experience of past times, and the results of modern science have shown to be useful, we see no reason why they should not be productive of an equal amount of good to the class of patients with which they mostly have to deal.

But to hydropathy, as now understood and practiced, we may apply the language of an admirable and unanswerable critique on Homeopathy in the "Atlantic Monthly" for December, 1857, words which, from their careless ease, truthfulness and elegance, it seems to us could only have fallen from the inimitable "Autocrat" and "Professor" in one of his happiest breakfast-table moods.

"It pleases," says the critic, "the imagination, it is image-worship, relic-wearing, holy-water sprinkling, transferred from the spiritual world to that of the body. Poets accept it, sensitive and spiritual women become Sisters of Charity in its service; yet we must own that it may have been indirectly useful, as the older farce of the weapon ointment was, in teaching medical practitioners to place more reliance on nature. Most scientific men see through its deceptions at a glance. It may be practiced by shrewd men and by honest ones; rarely, it must be feared, by those who are both shrewd and honest."

But it is unnecessary, and would occupy too much time and space, to trace the operation and influence of the psychological element through all grades of charlatanism, from the refinements of homeopathy, "that most epigrammatical of paradoxes, that crowning ex-

plot of pseudo-scientific audacity," to use the words of the critic already quoted, down to the mountebanks of the St. John Long and Cagliostro school, the Pain Killers, the Ready Relievers, the pill, sarsaparilla, and plaster makers ; for the success of all these worthies depends, as we have ample proof and illustration, upon the most powerful psychological element in human nature, credulity.

We all know that agues have been cured by the most opposite and heterogeneous means. Even the most ridiculous and disgusting have often proved the most successful, probably from giving greater play to the operations of the psychological element. Let us therefore take this as a type of the whole class of operations.

We should not be discharging our obligations to medical psychology, and to science, but taking a one-sided view of the question, if we neglected to consider carefully in this connection the manifold relations of the former to the ordinary practice of medicine ; to allopathy, as it has been somewhat unhappily termed, in mere contradistinction to homeopathy. In allopathy the psychological element has had to contend not with a mere nullity, but with physical agents, powerful for good or evil ; agents, we must confess with sorrow, often grossly misapplied, through ignorance and error of judgment on the part of miserable pretenders to medical skill, with which this noble science, now painfully emerging from the bogs and quagmires of superstition and ignorance, false doctrine and authority, is infested.

It is painful to make this humiliating acknowledgment, but truth calls aloud for it, and the interests of humanity seem to demand it at our hand. Let us therefore deal with all these morbid excrescences which have engrafted themselves upon the body of our noble art, like a faithful and conscientious surgeon, determined to know the worst, and, if necessary, to apply the knife.

When we look back over the records of medical experience, and consider what the human organization has been subjected to through the prevailing theories and ideas of men respecting the nature of disease and the operation of remedies, we cannot fail to see that the struggle has been in too many instances, between nature and her most salutary operations on the one hand, and the allied powers of

disease, the physician, and the operation of his remedial means on the other. And it is somewhat surprising, how, in the unequal contest and against such fearful odds, the victory has been so frequently gained by the former, while the latter have uniformly, and most unjustly usurped the laurels. Whole volumes might be filled with illustrations of this melancholy truth, but such will readily suggest themselves to every candid and enlightened mind in the profession.

But the dawn of a brighter and happier day is already perceived. The principles of a sound philosophy are being applied to medical science in all its branches, and the operations of nature in disease, and the systematic phenomena observable, are, on the whole recognized, and calculated to lead to a favorable result, if closely watched and duly modified by the operation of remedial means, both physical and psychological, now much better understood than in former times.

We venture to assert, without the least desire to disparage physical means, which, notwithstanding their manifold abuses, we still hold in veneration, and shall continue to while man has a physical organization to which they are applicable, that the bringing about of this happy result, is, in no small degree, dependent upon a better understanding, not only of the operations of nature in disease, but of that psychological element the influence of which we have been striving to illustrate, in so far as it has contributed to the success of systems where the physical means have been either a complete nullity or bordering upon it, and we shall now attempt to illustrate its influence in a system where the physical means have ever been the very antipodes of this.

No physician of discernment and experience can have failed to observe, with how much more ease and satisfaction to himself, he is enabled to conduct a case of disease to a satisfactory termination, when he possesses the free and complete confidence of his patient. In fact, so important is this to secure it should be the first object of the intelligent physician, an object, we had almost said, paramount in importance to all others.

With it almost all his remedies, unless applied most injudiciously,

and with great want of skill are sure to agree. Without it whatever they may be, even the most inert substances, are sure to disagree. Every physician must have observed this, particularly, if from untoward circumstances on his part, and ill luck on the part of his patient, he is under the necessity of treating one who has no confidence in his system of practice. Who would not sooner be compelled to treat a case, having this implicit confidence of the patient, though deprived of every thing else (except perhaps homeopathic remedies, and cold water) than be without confidence, and backed by the most potent articles of the *materia medica*? In attaching so much importance to this matter, let us not by any means be understood as undervaluing any physical means, which experience has demonstrated to be useful when properly applied. We would contend strongly for the combined operation of both physical and psychological means, for in the proper and judicious combination of the two consists the strength of the truly great and eminent practitioner, as the biography of all such men amply illustrates. The very name and personal presence alone of such men as Paré, Baron Larrey, Abernethy, Astley Cooper, and Sir Benj. Brodie, have been sufficient to impart a curative impulse to many a poor sufferer from the more severe bodily diseases and wounds.

Mrs. Sigourney, in her lines on the death of Dr. Brigham, says with great truth as well as beauty :

"The sufferer marked his *hope-inspiring* brow,
His warm solicitude, his truthful soul,
And took new courage. Well he knew to blend
The friend with the physician; and to win
The confidence of those he toiled to save;
Poising the weapons that his science gave
With wariest skill, as one who feared their power
And fain would aid weak nature to avoid
Nor tempt their discipline."

The above lines point out briefly all that belongs to legitimate success in the noble art of medicine, and it is evident to all who knew this eminent man, that the amiable and truthful poetess drew the sketch from a close observation of his manner of dealing with his patients.

In the first place the confidence of the patient is to be secured by kindness, truthfulness, and a genuine humanity, prompting that "warm solicitude" for his welfare here pointed out, and not by knowing looks, and pompous words of doubtful meaning, which may catch the ears of fools, but to sensible men and women are evidence of the emptiness of his head and heart.

This confidence once legitimately secured, and the battle is half won, for the force of the psychological element we have insisted upon, is brought into active coöperation with other means. The battle as we have said is *half* won, but only half won, for this confidence once secured, is not to be abused by infinitesimal jugglery, *un-holy-water-sprinkling*, or any description of pseudo-scientific humbug and quackery, in the use of physical means, but by carefully estimating and applying such as an enlightened experience, and true scientific research have given, by those who know well their power for good or evil, and are capable of applying them in a manner becoming reasonable beings.

The genuine physician should be a man endowed by nature with peculiar gifts of disposition and mind; one who has some understanding, not only of himself but of that world of mind and matter, with which he is in contact, and of which he forms a part; a man who should combine large scientific attainments, with broad and liberal views; one unswayed by prejudice, and untrammelled by authority; fit to estimate all systems, by whatever name they may be called, by their true value, and by the amount of good they contain, and capable of applying the principles of a sound philosophy and vigorous logic to all; separating the good and true from that which is modern, and combining it with the good and true of that which is ancient and time-honored, retaining nothing which is bad, and rejecting nothing which is good, from whatever source it may emanate.

The sacred maxim, "Prove all things—hold fast to that which is good" is equally applicable to the physician and the theologian, and, though a hard doctrine, it is one which lays at the foundation—is a "chief corner-stone"—of the temple of truth: yet, as we have said, so hard to follow, it is greatly to be feared that from

indolence, carelessness, or mental obtuseness, men in all callings are more apt to prove nothing, but hold fast to that which is bad, having it on the "authority of the fathers." But those who have observed carefully the signs of the times cannot fail to have been impressed with the strong tendency of the human mind in this age to question closely all authority which has the least semblance of being doubtful.

Truths, to be accepted as such, must be absolute and unmixed, without even the shadow of doubt.

The times when, without questioning, one man was ready to believe implicitly another man's imagination, in order to save either body or soul from destruction, are rapidly passing away, and what is imaginary and what is real, what is genuine and what is false, are questions which every man who thinks at all is beginning to ask of himself and not of his neighbors, and to seek a solution within the deepest recesses of his own spiritual and material nature. Men are now beginning to see that it is far worse to believe a lie than to be denounced as heretics or infidels in theology, or quacks and charlatans in medicine, for refusing to give their assent to a dogma.

Fearful men, and men of narrow views look on from a distance, trembling and quaking when some intellectual giant lays his strong grasp upon the pillars which support some towering structure of error, and causes it to tremble to its foundations, lest the beautiful temple of truth should also fall, and be crushed and buried among the ruins: but such fears are groundless, for

"Truth crushed to earth will rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers."

The light of truth cannot be permanently concealed. It may perhaps be eclipsed for a time, but it will shine forth anew with increased brightness. That which is true cannot be overturned, for its foundations are laid deep upon the "Rock of Ages." Let therefore system succeed system, and innovation follow innovation in rapid succession, that and that only which is true will remain behind to confer upon mankind its benefits and its blessings; and that in all systems which have been, or may yet spring up, which is untrue and

hurtful, will be swept away in the onward march of things, and come to be remembered only by the evil it has wrought.

One thing, however, is evident to all who have looked carefully into the present tendency of every thing relating to our art. It is this : whenever in coming time medicine shall assume, or even approximate anything like a perfect scientific system, that system, by whatever name it may be called, will be one based upon a more thorough comprehension of the entire corporo-spiritual nature of man, than any that has preceded it, for we are fully persuaded of the profound meaning, and far seeing and truthful insight of the words of Damerow placed at the head of this paper, that — “The future elevation of medical science in all its branches, will be most intimately connected with the advancement of psychological knowledge.

